

Sharing Jesus Boldly

Acts 4:1-31

Key Verse: 4:29

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”

For those who like science fiction, every Star Trek & Next generation episode began with the theme, “To boldly go where no one has gone before.” The purpose of the Enterprise crew was to bravely explore new worlds and civilizations. To be an explorer, they needed boldness because they never knew what kind of challenge they would run into next. It’s not much different being a Christian. As Christians, one quality that we could take away from Star Trek is boldness. I heard a story about a young boy who had a little dog. When asked, “What kind of dog was he?” the boy responded, “He’s a police dog.” “But he doesn’t look like a police dog,” the questioner replied. “That’s because he’s in the secret service,” said the boy. Unfortunately, there are a lot of Christians who are just like that little dog. They themselves are saved, but no one knows they’re Christians because their faith is undercover like the secret service. They are cowardly Christians. They don’t want people to think that they’re weird, so they don’t pray for their meals at work, school or when they’re in a restaurant. They don’t mention the name of Jesus at family gatherings because they don’t want to get anyone upset. Are you one of these cowardly Christians or are you a bold believer? Through today’s passage let’s take a look at what happens when two disciples share Jesus boldly.

Just before our passage takes place, in chapter 3, Peter and John were going to pray at the temple. Along the way they ran into a 40 year old man who had been crippled from birth. The man was begging for money but of course they had nothing to give him. Then Peter famously said to the man, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” (Acts 3:6) Then Peter took him by the hand and helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong and he could walk. Then all three of them went into to the temple walking and jumping and praising God. It was a miraculous sight and when all the people realized what had happened, and who this man was, they too joined in praising God. Peter seeing the opportunity laid before him began to proclaim the gospel to the crowd.

Now as chapter 4 opens, “The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.”² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” (v1-2) The Sadducees were disturbed because Peter & John were: 1. teaching the people. Only the religious leaders were supposed to be teaching the people. The disciples were not “qualified” to teach. 2. They were proclaiming that through Jesus there is resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees controlled the temple. The captain of the temple guard was a Sadducee and he was #2 in charge behind the high priest. The Sadducees didn’t believe in resurrection that’s why they didn’t like Peter and John teaching about it because if they kept doing it, they would undermine the Sadducee’s authority. More than that, the Sadducees were the ones who came up with the idea that Jesus should be killed. Caiaphas and Annas were the ring leaders who conspired with the Romans and other Jews to have Jesus exterminated. Jesus’ trial was a mockery of justice, everything about it was invalid and the disciple’s teaching would point to their guilt. So to say that they were greatly disturbed would be an understatement. In order to stop them, the Sadducees arrested Peter and John and threw them in jail for the night. The Sadducees needed some time to think about what they were going to do with them. Even this was against their own law for they were supposed to settle all legal matters before nightfall.

“The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.”⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family.⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” (v5-7) The religious leaders wanted

to know how the disciples performed the miracle and who gave them the authority to do it. They put the disciples into a high pressure situation like a police interrogation trying to get the answers.

The pressure was on Peter and John. The last time Peter was put in this situation was when he followed this same group of religious leaders when they arrested Jesus. Three times he had been put on the spot asking who he was and each time he denied their charge and in the end he denied even knowing Jesus. What was he going to do now? How would he respond under their pressure, knowing that these men had Jesus killed? Let's read verses 8-12. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'" When Peter spoke this time, it was different than before, for now he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God and He has power and wisdom. The Holy Spirit drives out all fear from our hearts and fills us with courage and boldness. Romans 8:15 says, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" When Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he became courageous. He could overcome the pressure and fear and give glory to God by sharing Jesus. The Holy Spirit even gave him a sense of humor to deal with the situation. The very stiff looking religious leaders, in all seriousness, were trying to bring charges against the disciples. What was the charge? They couldn't say. So Peter began by mentioning it. It was for showing kindness to a crippled man. What a crazy charge. Peter did more than answer their charge. He took this opportunity to share Jesus with them. He quoted Psalm 118:22, look at verse 11. "He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'" The religious leaders wanted to build their own kingdom on earth with money and power. But when Jesus' pure and holy life challenged their corruption, they were overcome by their self-righteous pride and put Jesus to death. They wanted to throw Jesus away but God raised him from the dead and made him the capstone. Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophets and the covenant promise made to Abraham. Jesus is the descendant of David who reigns forever. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He made Jesus King of kings and Lord of lords.

Peter concluded with verse 12. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Here, Peter goes beyond any previous statement to declare that only Jesus saves. It's one thing to say that Jesus saves. It's quite another to say that only Jesus saves. Peter had absolute conviction that only Jesus saves. He had no doubt. This came from Peter's understanding of the Bible because as we learned the whole Bible points to Jesus Christ, He is the way God provided for man's salvation. There is no other. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6) When Peter said that only Jesus saves, he was challenging the religious leaders and all Israel that without Jesus they would perish in their sins under eternal condemnation. When Peter said that only Jesus saves, he was sharing his personal assurance that he had eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ alone.

When Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was a completely different person. Gone was the fearful man who ran away from a servant girl and in his place stood a man bursting with conviction and boldness. Peter didn't try to dodge the question or give a vague answer instead he took it head on and spoke with authority, as if God were right there beside him. (Jesus told him when he went up to heaven that he would be with us to the very end of the age – Mt 28) And the religious leader took notice. They were astonished and speechless when they saw Peter's courage and boldness.

What we need, is boldness like this. Boldness is not arrogance. Some Christians are rude and arrogant thinking that it is boldness. But they don't realize that they're doing more to turn people away from Jesus than toward him. Boldness

is not presumption or showing off to others what you can do. Biblical boldness is having the courage to stand for Jesus when everyone else is against you. What was the basis of Peter's boldness? It came from God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and in this passage you can find three keys that unlock the bold and courageous spirit from within us. The first key can be found in verse 13. "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." Did you find the first key? The first key is that the disciples had been with Jesus. They spent time in the company of God the Son. This is not superficial shallow time that you spend with someone who you can't even remember their name. You have to make sure that Jesus is real to you, not just head knowledge, but personal knowledge of Him, just like you know your parents. Quality time alone with Jesus is how we build a personal relationship with him. That means we have to sacrifice time for other non-essential things to be with him. Imagine what would happen if you didn't spend time with your wife, (or close family member- for those who are not married) how intimate and personal would your relationship be? If we didn't make time, the relationship would dissolve. It's the same with Jesus, to know him, you have to spend time with him. And we do this through prayer and reading the Bible. Does Jesus mean enough to you to spend time getting to know him?

Now the religious leaders found themselves in a dilemma. They wanted to stop what was being said about Jesus from spreading any further, but they couldn't do anything to the disciples without starting a riot. Because amazingly, in a short time since Jesus' resurrection, the number of believers grew from 120 to about 5K and that's not including women and children. It seemed that anyone who heard the disciples' message simply believed. (v4) So not knowing what else to do, they commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John refused to listen saying, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (v19-20) Then without knowing what else to do the religious leaders threaten them some more and let them go.

"On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them."²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God." (v23-24) In the believer's prayer we can find the second key that unlocked their boldness. Take a look at their prayer which starts in verse 24 to 28. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them."²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?"²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One."²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed."²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." The second key is that they stood on the confidence in God the Father. They were not shaky in their faith. They believed without a doubt that God is sovereign, he is almighty, and that he created the heavens and the earth and everything in it. They believed that God is always in control. They saw that what happened to Jesus was all according to God's pre-determined plan. They looked at the situation not from their perspective but from God's point of view. Just like the disciples, we have to have faith in God the Father too. (v24) God created the heavens and the earth. We serve a powerful, almighty God. We have to believe and trust in him. We don't have to be afraid, because we have a powerful God to back us up.

Sometimes we become fearful when we see things happening in the world. The Republicans get fearful when the Democrats come to power and Democrats get fearful when Republicans get in power. But the reality is that everything happens according to how God wants it to happen. (v28) We might not like our leadership but they are not in control, God is in control. God isn't sitting in heaven going, "Oh, no, the stock market dropped 500 points today, what am I going to do now!" God is in control and we can never lose perspective of that. What problems are you facing currently? Ok, now double them. And double them again. Is God too small to solve those problems? Of course not, God is

almighty, if he created the world surely he can solve whatever problem you have. Most of the time, we have problems so that we can come to know who God is through them. Without problems, we would never turn to God.

The third key to unlock boldness can be found in verses 29-31. Let's read them together. "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." The last key is that they acted in courage through God the Spirit. Why were Peter and John arrested in the first place? Because they healed a sick man and spoke about Jesus. And what was their prayer topic now? That they could heal the sick and speak about Jesus even more boldly than before. They didn't pray to have a better situation, or for punishment upon their persecutors, or even for their personal safety. They prayed to do what got them in trouble in the first place but even more boldly than before. This reminds me of the Voice of Martyrs, when we participated in the International Day of Prayer last year. They're prayer is much like the disciples. They don't pray for their personal safety but for courage, so that they won't stop speaking the name of Jesus.

These days people complain if you greet them with "Merry Christmas" instead of the generic "Happy Holidays." Don't even dare saying anything about Jesus. If you mention the name of Jesus, you will be considered a fanatic. On the other hand M. Deborah has a co-worker who boldly shares her faith in Islam and prays 5 times a day. And many people are bold about their sexual identity and if you don't agree with them, you are labeled as a hater. In our times we need boldness.

If we are not bold believers, then this leads us to ask ourselves, "why are we not bold?" It may be that you are not bold because you don't really know Jesus in the way you should know him. Maybe you haven't spent enough time with him. Boldness & courage are fruits that reflect our relationship with Jesus. Another reason that we are not bold is maybe there is some un-confessed sin in your life. God will not take us if there is any un-confessed sin remaining in our life. We must be pure in heart to be used by God. Or maybe you are not bold because you do not want to risk losing something. The truth is, when we share Jesus boldly, we will lose something. Maybe we will lose some friends, or a job, or our status, something. We should know that if the world hated Jesus, it will also hate those who follow him as well. However don't count the cost of following Jesus, see the value in following Jesus, for when you follow Him, you will receive treasure in heaven. When the early Christians prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (v31)

The challenge that lays before us is to make the name of Jesus known on the campus and in the community. When we live in the company of God the Son, and stand in confidence in God the Father and act in courage through God the Spirit the fruit of our relationship with God is that we will boldly share Jesus. This is not a recipe for success but they are key components that can unlock the boldness that God had put in each of our hearts. 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." The only question left is: are you going to live as a secret service agent (cowardly Christian) or stand with Jesus on the front line as a bold believer?